The IDLER

Public Occurrences, Comment, Excursions & Rational Entertainment

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A Mean Fall

WASHINGTON NOTES

Even Snoopy's House Burned

WASHINGTON

The city has been in a mean mood, mirroring, no doubt, the tenseness of the nation. The war, the price of bread, the stock market, riots, the unavailability of loans, inexplicable murders in Austin and Chicago, have all contributed. But it is not just the negatives that trouble us. There has been, over the last few months, a discouraging lack of news larded with hope. No startling medical discoveries, no great human triumphs, little indication that the country or the world is making progress over old evils. Even Snoopy's house burned to the ground.

Here, Congress skulked along to adjournment. In an election year, the national well-being is defined in 500 different ways, each limited by the boundaries of a district or a state. And this campaign was worse. The constituents were too ambiguous. There were too many jokers in the pack. Ambivalence over Vietnam. The backlash. The people's reaction to LBJ. How to evaluate the "Draft Luci" sign scratched on the wall of a highway restaurant.

There was a surfeit of doubt. The President seemed uncertain whether to press the war or get rid of it. Arthur Goldberg's speech to the United Nations helped to confuse matters. One thing was apparent from that address: when and if the Administration decides to get out of Vietnam, it will get out the same way it got in—with lies and camouflage of purpose. Goldberg spoke in the phrases of an altered policy but he disclaimed any change. Which is the case? Do we deny desire for an American presence in the Far East, as Goldberg stated, or do we still have what President Johnson has called a "determination to meet our obligations in Asia as a Pacific power" with all that implies?

Mr. Johnson seemed more sullen, petulant and erratic than usual. Originally planning to campaign in many congressional districts, he suddenly lost his ardor and decided more votes could be gained by one trip to Manila. His announcement of the new Undersecretary of State was made with an exceptional lack of grace. And his assertion that those who speculated on presidential appointments only killed the chances of those subject to speculation appeared absurdly childish.

The congressional leaders weren't much better. Senator Dirksen led his Republicans in a successful attack on new and needed civil rights legislation. Senator Mansfield made the suggestion, incredible to the families of the 96% of southern Negro children who still attend all-black schools and to the parents of newly segregated children in the North, that school integration was going too fast. Harold Howe, Commissioner of Education and one of the few men in Washington today who hasn't hocked all his guts at the Perdenales pawnshop, was viciously berated in the House by

One of the saddest displays of Congress's closing days was the manner in which the Senate killed hope for Washington home rule. This city's 800,000 residents, who get less practical experience in democracy than Vietnamese peasants, were denied again the right to run their own local affairs. Home rule came closer to passage this year than it has for a long time. But the Senate was tired and wanted to go home and the matter was quickly tabled.

Meanwhile, Congress, which has winked at southern committee chairmen flouting its will, blinked at Baker and nodded at Dodd, finally got Adam Powell, who happened to be born Negro, but who otherwise has failings remarkably, if unfortunately, in keeping with the current congressional standard. And that, the legislators figured, was enough morality for one session. *(s.s.)*

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The Idler

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"Witty graffiti wanted for serious psychological study. Please give place and approx. date seen. Box A-139."
—Classified ad in Fact Magazine

Dirty words on bathroom wall,
Filthy scribble, smutty scrawl;
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Raised in literary strata
For it aids us in our data.
What was once obscene defiance
Now's a boon to social science.

So when you write us, please relate
Where it was seen and approx. date;
Then with your record from the john
Man's quest for knowledge will march on.

—s.s.

The Dancing Art

By Erbin Crowell

If you want to dance you must pay the piper.
—English proverb, c. 1680

Since the Beach boys have captured serious musical activity in America and since art circles are screaming childish delight and scribbling outlandish checks for second-grade reproductions of soup cartons, it is not surprising to learn that the world of serious dancing is being seized, for fun and profit, by Art Linkletter.

Art Linkletter is a good guy. He loves kids. If you don't believe he loves kids, watch his daily TV show. See how he loves kids? See how he makes them say funny things and gives them electric war games and dolls that pee on themselves? And because old Art loves kids, he's gonna teach all the kids in America to dance. And if serious dance training is an arduous task requiring sacrifice, devotion and endurance, that's okay. Old Art is gonna make it all as simple as a trip to the supermarket. And about as serious as chromium violins and training bras for little girls.

Art Linkletter launched this altruistic venture with Fred Totten a few years ago. Totten was a famous dance instructor who had a system of instruction for sale. All he needed was a big name to pack 'em in. And everybody knows old Art Linkletter and how he loves kids even more than he loves RC Cola. So they formed their partnership to import culture to the shopping centers of suburban America.

The Linkletter-Totten Chain of Children's Dance Studios is the largest of its kind in the nation, rivaling Safeway and Sears in its efforts to bring cellophane-wrapped wonders of life and week-end sale values of culture to the masses. Its success has been achieved through such traditional teaching methods as giving free trips to Hollywood for lunch with Art to lucky ladies who win the Linkletter Lady Contest by signing up the most kids for the flight into culture. The most talented and devoted in the techniques of registration and public relations even get their pictures in **Link Letter**, the chain's official magazine. One can only admire the technical skill and controlled grace of the block-canvass

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arabesques, the phone-referral-sales **pas de deux** and the sales-manual-winning-smile pirouettes as performed by these promoters of man's oldest art form. As the **Link Letter** points out, one of the champion artists had an average in her sales campaign of .333, "a better percentage than Mickey Mantle or Roger Maris," both memorable members of a famed New York ballet troup.

Not that Linkletter is unmindful of the cultural roots of dancing. Not that he ignores the classic intention of the ballet. It is all spelled out in the home practice manual. His kids, with the full rich tones of tragic opera and replete with gestures, sing:

Well, we are the famous Linkletter-Totten Tots.
At dancing school we learn a lot.
We work very hard so we can be
In radio, movies and TV.

The Linkletter-Totten method of instruction also incorporates the time-justified tactic of bringing the mass of parents up to the high level of culture attained by their kids. Parents' nights

are held regularly so that proud progenators can view the progress of their budding ballerinas. These shows are usually given on or near major holidays to keep interest and attendance up. While these programs are not instituted for the purpose of gaining additional revenue, it is pointed out that a well merchandized and well-organized show will *almost always return a profit. The child is only charged* $2.50 to participate.

To instill in the young ballerinas the value of the art form, the Linkletter-Totten studios use the classic techniques of leotards autographed by Art Linkletter, blue ribbons for particularly exciting performances, trophies for team efforts and a series of progress competitions. Since children love competition more than they could possibly respond to dancing, efforts are made to assure that a competitive spirit reigns. This is advantageous to the studio for several reasons. Attendance becomes more important (children don't have to pay when they are absent). Parents are drawn into the picture since they are vitally interested in the child's progress and competition of any kind.

On a competition day, the studio is decked with posters, banners, streamers and team colors. Mothers are asked to make a car caravan to transport the children from one Linkletter studio to another, and they are asked to use banners and crepe paper streamers on the cars. The M.C. begins the competition, calls for frequent applause and finally hands out the ribbons and loving cups. The team trophy, of course, is to be kept in the studio that won it.

No child is too young to participate in this artistic endeavor, says Art. Even babies can enroll, provided, of course, their parents meet the fee and see to it that their infants practice at home such classic numbers as the Baby Buck, the Baby Strut, the Baby Folk, the Baby Hawaiian, Silly Spooks and Goblins, the Baby Boogie, the Baby Jazz; not forgetting that famous solo, the Baby Military.

Also, if your child shows particular love and aptitude for the dance, she may be one of the select few chosen for the Talent Unit program. This honor is reserved for those who meet certain talent and personality qualifications and who deserve the opportunity to perfect their abilities. This latter means the parent has only to pay seven dollars a month so that the child can be a part of publicity stunts that advertise the Linkletter-Totten schools. Participation in the Talent Unit advertising gimick is a great honor, and the parent is told that it can lead to a highly professional dancing career. The parent's obligation, in addition to paying for this privilege, is merely to see that his child fulfills commitments for sessions, rehearsals and appearances. The parents are also expected to furnish all transportation and costumes.

So if your child shows aptitude for dancing and can withstand the rigors of medals, trophies, progress competitions, home-practice phonograph records, etc., you know where to go. The old American easy method of quick learning and painless perfection in luxurious surroundings whereby you, too, can become a star has come to the world of serious dancing.

Perhaps it is true that Americans can only participate in culture if it is coated with the sugar dreams of the Ted Mack Amateur Hour and shoved down our throats by massive slick sales campaigns. Appreciation of art may depend on crepe paper caravans of housewives'

HUMOR BOOKS

Send stamped-addressed envelope to Laff Book Club, 4323 32nd Rd. So., Arlington, Va., 22206, for free copy of Laff Book Club Newsletter. "Very funny," says Humor Lobbyist Jim Atkins.

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station wagons transporting their little dancing soldiers off to ballet battles. Maybe activities which can develop coordination, grace, self-confidence and general physical health are not enough. How could we expect a child to discover the satisfaction of graceful, controlled, beautiful body movement without the prestige of an Art Linkletter autograph on her leotards?

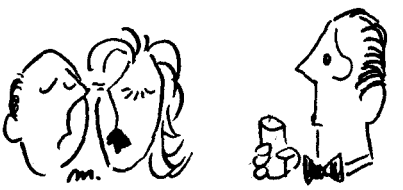
So come and trip it as ye go; you don't have to bear the entire burden of expense. The tradition and art of the dance is also paying the piper.

The Idler's Journal

I have recently left that state which the tax and selective service laws consider as having the least redeeming economic and social value: bachelorhood. The cause of my departure is a wonderful girl named Kathy and the transition is one I make with no regrets. Twenty-nine years as a bachelor is too long according to the law of averages and plenty long enough according to my constitution. Still, I can't open the benedict's door without a few words in behalf of my former associates, words that I can now offer without fear of having a vested interest in the case.

The bachelor is the nation's most undervalued public servant. In times of peace, he contributes a disproportionate share of the tax revenues. He inhibits the population explosion, birth control being after all the sina qua non of bachelorhood. He reduces the chance of famine. Since he has more leisure time than the married male and since he generally treats his female companions in a more luxurious fashion than most men treat their wives, he adds greatly to the growth of expenditures for sports cars, ski-weekends, high-priced restaurant meals, nightclub entertainment and other items in the superfluous sector of our economy, upon which the gross national product increasingly depends.

The bachelor quietly and humbly goes about his business, proliferating the public good without proliferating the public, and adding not one whit to the demand for elementary schools, playgrounds, aid to dependent children, high chairs, kiddies' TV shows, juvenile delinquency, divorce courts, teen-age record hops, tricycles in the driveway or Pablum. And for this massive service to the nation, he is rewarded in times of war with the first induction notice.



Injustice to the single men is lashed to our system. We have national days to honor mothers and fathers, those most responsible for urban overcrowding, jammed turnpikes and welfare expenses. But not for a moment does the country pause to pay homage to those men who stoically and at great personal sacrifices keep our procreative excesses from bursting all bounds. We, in fact, treat them to the country.

We make them pay high automobile insurance rates. We suspect their sexual adequacy and propriety. We bombard them with the endless query: "When are you going to get married?" We trial match them with every niece, next-door neighbor, secretary or other unattached female who crosses our path without the slightest concern for potential compatibility. We publicly and repeatedly dispair of them and indicate, in jest or otherwise, that they have failed in life's mission.

The bachelor must incessantly defend the course that chance, circumstances or choice has dictated against the overwhelming general assumption that it is unfortunate, undesirable and probably immoral.

There are any number of good reasons for remaining single past the time in life when, according to the Census Bureal, most good Americans marry. One may not be able to afford a wife, one may not have found a girl one wishes to marry, or one may simply prefer the single life, at least for a while longer. The bachelor need only look at the divorce rates or the experiences of those around him to confirm his notion that marriage is not a condition inevitably preferable to his own. Americans tend to regard a marriage license as they do their college degrees, cars and jobs. Good, bad or mediocre, you've got to have it to get ahead. Despite the affluence of choice around us, we are a make-do generation. We rush into an assortment of dubious deals in the belief that action makes progress. One can also progress by waiting.

A primary source of discouragement for the bachelor who does seek a wife is the discovery that a large proportion of the American female population is not trained for the task. He can easily obtain a classmate, an intellectual sparring partner, a wage earner, a career

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competitor, or a cosmeticized social accessory, but a wife is something else again. American women have, in their struggle for equality, considerably defeminized themselves. They have, it is true, the patina of femininity. They buy it at the drug store, they spend hours at the hairdresser having it grafted to their scalps, they inject it into their breasts, they drape themselves in it at great expense. But their concern with developing it in the soul, the place that really counts, has withered.

There is no argument here for sterile domesticity. Still, a woman does not need to deny her sex in order to be free nor does she have to emulate the slavish life of the male in order to find happiness. Ask a man what he would do if he really had a choice and chances are that he would pick a life liberated of the tedium and worry that the necessity of a paycheck forces upon him. It is ironic that so many women's idea of freedom is an opportunity to get ulcers equal to that of the male's.

Unfortunately, too many women seeking to develop their intellectual and creative abilities feel they must stick to the male's ground rules. They remind one of a left-handed batter trying to get the cleanup spot on the team by batting right-handed because that's the way most players succeed. They end up only frustrating themselves and their families.

There are, of course, many women who have little interest in such ambitions, but they're not much use to the wife-seeker either. Our educational system teaches women to be dissatisfied with anything faintly domestic. Our economy also encourages the idea that house-work, child-rearing and husband-tending are drudgery and provides a welter of short-cuts to lessen that drudgery. Alas, strawberries that explode in the corn flakes are not an adequate replacement for love and the purchase of a new super soap does not constitute constructive emotional involvement in the home.

The bachelor, suveying possible mates then, soon finds that there are few who are truly interested in being wives and mothers. Some have other things on their minds. Some have nothing else on their minds, but don't like the idea anyway.

It is, of course, possible to marry both early and well. Many of my friends did and they are fortunate men. The odds, however, do not run in that direction. Rather they suggest that an extended period of bachelorhood is more an indication of wisdom than of failure.

Still, much as one may praise the virtues of the single estate and much as one may enjoy its pleasures, being a bachelor becomes increasingly a lonely business. The advantages space themselves further apart. And in the end one discovers that the greatest exhileration of the period is to bring it to a close with someone who has made the wait worthwhile.

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The McDowell Papers

By Charles McDowell, Jr.

We bought an umbrella the other day because President Johnson would have wanted us to.

The choice was between the umbrella and a new raincoat. The umbrella represented a much smaller capital investment, contributed to the hold-down on inflation, and conceivably kept us out of the money market when interest rates are dangerously high.

We put the umbrella on the back seat of our Volkswagen and drove to a parking garage near the National Press Building. Reaching back to get it, we somehow tripped its spring-loaded mechanism. With a whump and some thrashing about, the umbrella opened itself vigorously.

Until you have been in a Volkswagen with a large and forcefully expanding umbrella, you have missed a good chance to experience the combined complications of inflation and modern technology.

The umbrella forced us right out of the car. Then, on one of its tines, the umbrella presented to the startled parking attendant an old tennis sock that had been somewhere in the back of the car.

There was no dignity in the whole interlude. It destroyed the mood of self-confidence and sophistication that a man likes to feel when he is on his way to his office to write something superior about bumbling politicians.

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Actually, umbrellas almost always have an insidious influence on male owners. Umbrellas are distracting and even demeaning things to own.

Our studies show that a man with an umbrella spends between 10 and 15 per cent of his time thinking about not losing it.

In railroad stations and taxicabs, in restaurants and business meetings, a man can become psychotically preoccupied with his umbrella. To take an umbrella away from home in the morning and arrive home without it makes a man as vulnerable to wifely displeasure as if he had forgotten a wedding anniversary or misplaced one of the children.

Anyone who sells umbrellas will tell you about the men who buy three or four or five replacements a year rather than go home and confess that they have lost their umbrella. This plays havoc with the economy, of course, and contributes to the breakdown in morality that troubles the country.

It is not unusual for chronic umbrella-losers to begin hanging around bars on rainy days, drinking their shame away, and then stealing an umbhellas as they leave.

There are other problems about umbrellas. One of them involves the persistent suspicion among American males that umbrellas are effete.

A big, black, open umbrella may be masculine enough. But a very tightly and neatly furled umbrella carried like a cane is a best foppish; at worst, dainty.

That is why some men take pains to furl their umbrllas loosly and lumpily, and carry them with studied awkwardness.

Leading politicians—Presidents, Vice Presidents, Cabinet members, Congressmen with ambition, contenders for statesmanship generally — never carry umbrellas. They will accept refuge under one, perhaps, if somebody else holds it, but they will not touch one of the things personally.

This is the Neville Chamberlain syndrome. Before World War II, Prime Minister Chamberlain of Great Britain came home from Munich and was photographed with an umbrella while he explained how he had made his own deal with Hitler for "peace in our time." The

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umbrella became the symbol of appeasement.

So now the chauffeurs of great men in Washington carry their umbrellas for them, and the rest of us just do the best we can not to lose ours or let them make fools of us.

(Copyright, Newsday, 1966)

I cannot long for rose-fingered dawns
(Though played virtuoso on prismatic themes)
To change frantic dreams to frolicking fawns,
When, caught in choice that spawns my abyss,
I secretly grasp you, parched and bark-scraped,
To press dark-graped lips for a gunmetal kiss.

—*George Ellis*

HUGH HAYNIE ...

Alligators

Grimly hangs the alligator on
Millenium after millenium
He still doesn't know he hasn't won.
Beasts like this are demode
No one now asks him to stay
But he's too pre-flood to change his way.
Like a mildewed log, without allure,
A perfect type for Henry Moore,
He has become a rustic boor.
And yet the creature's everywhere,
Within his Party, in the Chair,
We see his dull unwinking stare.
Sea-green, conservative, he lies low
Watching the burdened river flow
Determined to save his **status quo.**

—*Enid Candlin*

Flotsam & Jetsam

We wonder whether Rusk and McNamara have ever read these lines by that old imperialist Kipling:

"The end of the fight is a tombstone white
"With the name of the late deceased.
"And the epitaph drear: "A fool lies here who tried hustle the East!' "

When Rep. Joe Pool returned to Dallas following his sterling performance as acting chairman of the House Unamerican Activities Committee he offered this interesting self-assessment: "Little Joe has been catapulted into a very prominent spot in American history. Overnight. I didn't do anything that any other member of Congress wouldn't have done—if he'd come from Texas . . . The way I feel is you pass this way one time and it'l be nice to be able to contribute something while you're here."

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The Corner Aphorist

By Sam A. Darcy

☞November 1st was All-Saints Day. And the encyclopedia says that in Great Britain November is regarded as the gloomiest month of the year. We would assume the two facts to be not related, were it not that all the claimants to the saintly slaying of the Vietcong dragon this November are bringing us nothing but gloom. Come Thanksgiving Day, the biggest turkey will surely be the foreign policy of Johnson, Rusk, Dirkson and McNamara.

☞November is also election month. This recalls an exchange in a debate of candidates in Philadelphia.

Meaning to prove a point the first demanded: "Did you hear my last speech?"

"I most prayerfully hope so", wearily replied his opponent.

☞An appropriate story is told (I think quoting Lincoln):

"Who is the man on the dais?" asked the lady in the House of Representatives.

"He is the chaplain," her husband told her.

"Does he pray for the members?"

"No. He only looks at them and prays for the country."

☞The current fashion is to say that woman is physically stronger than man. Maybe that's true, writes Idler reader John Barry, but only physically. Mentally the male is stronger. "For example, my pregnant wife and I were given a book called Childbirth Without Pain. The doctor said that if we both read it and absorbed its lessons, there would be no pain. I made it! A little anxiety, maybe, but no pain. But my wife, oh boy, did she ever hurt!"

☞A great many loud mouths, we notice, who keep calling on others to shed the last drop of their blood in defense of "Vietnamese freedom," remain here in the U.S. being concerned not to shed even the first drop of their own, not their son's blood, nor the sons of their relatives nor close friends. Ask any leading politician next time you hear him whooping up for "not yielding" which of his young men are dying in the swamps and jungles. Humphrey's? McNamara's? Rusk's? Nixon's?

☞The sentiments of our young men about Vietnam are well expressed in their many and devious devices for avoiding the draft.

At one draft board, one man gave as his reason for asking for deferment: "One leg too short".

The next chap in line saw this and figured to make an even stronger case. He wrote: "Two legs too short".

☞Cousin Barnegat is home with a cold. So he wrote us:

"They say we must be willing to die in Vietnam because we were committed. I don't feel 'committed.' Nor do I know any reason why I should be. But I do believe that those who advocate dying in a country we were never in, hardly knew existed, never even met any of its inhabitants, who should be left alone to fight out their own battles, they should be committed, and they don't have to go 12,000 miles to the other side of the world, we have places right here for them."

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